New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1944

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1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1943 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
*Carmen Jones	207, 208, 209
Connecticut Yankee (A)	219, 220, 221, 222
Doctors Disagree	186, 187, 188
Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Listen, Professor	190, 191, 192
Lovers and Friends	210, 211, 212
Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
Othello	256, 257, 258
Outrageous Fortune	237, 238, 239
Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
South Pacific	184, 185, 186
Three's a Family	328, 329, 330
Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199, 200, 201, 202
What's Up	229, 230, 231
Winged Victory	216, 217, 218, 219
Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

1942 Vol.

Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
Janie	244, 245, 246
Rosalinda	187, 188, 189

1941 Vol.

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457, 458, 459

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 20, 1944.*

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Sadie Thompson"
"In Bed We Cry"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1944

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
According to Law	179
Allah Be Praised	207
*Anna Lucasta	143
*Bloomer Girl	118
Bright Boy	249
But Not Goodbye	220
Career Angel	184
*Catherine Was Great	154
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
*Chicken Every Sunday	232
Day Will Come (The)	136
Decision	265
Down to Miami	134
Dream With Music	188
Duke in Darkness (The)	279
*Follow the Girls	222
For Keeps	169
Good Morning Corporal	152
Helen Goes to Troy	201
Hickory Stick	190
Highland Fling (A)	198
House in Paris (The)	241
*I Remember Mama	111
*In Bed We Cry	86
Jackpot	284
*Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
Last Stop	138
Love on Leave	162
Lower North	146
*Meet a Body	116
Men to the Sea	124
*Mexican Hayride	271
Mrs. January and Mr. Ex	235
Mrs. Kimball Presents	254
Odds on Mrs. Oakley (The)	126
Only the Heart	230
Over Twenty-One	297
Peepshow	263
*Perfect Marriage (The)	104
Pick-Up Girl	196
Pretty Little Parlor	212
Public Relations	228
Ramshackle Inn	295
Right Next to Broadway	256
*Sadie Thompson	84
*School for Brides	156
*Searching Wind (The)	217
Sheppey	209
Sleep No More	142
Slightly Scandalous	172
*Snafu	106
*Soldier's Wife	121
*Song of Norway	149
*Star Time	132
Storm Operation	289
Strange Play (A)	179
Suds in Your Eye	287
Take a Bow	167
Take It As It Comes	261
*Ten Little Indians	160
Thank You, Svoboda	251
That Old Devil	177
Violet	109
*Visitor (The)	114
Wallflower	274
While the Sun Shines	130

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 20, 1944.*

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"Sadie Thompson"

Musical play by Howard Dietz and Rouben Mamoulian; lyrics by Mr. Dietz and music by Vernon Duke; based on the play, "Rain," by John Colton and Clemence Randolph; staged by Mr. Mamoulian; settings by Boris Aronson; dances by Edward Canton; presented by A. P. Waxman at Alvin Theater, November 16, 1944.

THE CAST

Joe Horn	Ralph Dumke
Corporal Hodgson	Daniel Cobb
Private Griggs	Norman Lawrence
Sergeant Tim O'Hara	James Newill
Ameena, Horn's wife	Grazia Narciso
Honeypie	Beatrice Kraft
Mrs. Alfred Davidson	Zolya Talma
Cicely St. Clair	Doris Patston
Lao Lao	Remington Olmsted
Sadie Thompson	June Havoc
Quartermaster Bates	Walter Burke
Rev. Alfred Davidson	Lansing Hatfield
Polynesian Girl	Milada Mladova
Polynesian Boy	Chris Volkoff

NEW YORK TIMES
November 17, 1944

"Sadie Thompson"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

SINCE that distant day when Somerset Maugham first found her in the South Seas, Sadie Thompson has had a varied, ambitious and successful career. She has been the heroine of a short story, of one of America's best known plays, of innumerable movies. Now she is back in still another incarnation, this musical play. Under her own name of "Sadie Thompson," she arrived at the Alvin last evening, and to put the matter as bluntly as would the Rev. Mr. Davidson, she is not at her happiest. "Rain," despite the able talent which has arranged for the translation, does not make a good musical show.

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In its present form, "Sadie Thompson" is neither play nor musical. Its dialogue, which follows closely enough to the original, is serious, and its performance is serious. But since the evening is musical, the story must be interrupted for song and ballet, which are not so serious. The mood of the story is lost in the orchestra, and the music is overwhelmed by the story. The result is that there are long stretches of talk which build up to the old tone of "Rain," only to be broken by songs of ships which sail at midnight, and by dances to the sun god. Those who will want the musical side of a Broadway show will find the book incredibly lengthy; those who are interested in the play will find the numerous songs an annoyance.

June Havoc is this year's Sadie, the most recent one in a famous line. She is an attractive person and looks like Sadie, but there are moments when she does not command the stage as Miss Thompson should. Her voice varies in singing the songs; with some she is excellent, with others appears to lack the necessary power. The Rev. Mr. Davidson on this occasion is Lansing Hatfield, who has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera Company; his voice is good, but his acting is not the last word for the part. James Newill is O'Hara, and is good at it, and Ralph Dumke is Joe Horn, the trader. The character of Joe is the nearest "Sadie Thompson" comes to comedy, and there is not much of that.

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Howard Dietz and Rouben Mamoulian have adapted the book and Vernon Duke has supplied the songs. Mr. Duke cannot be accused of laziness, for he has turned out a long score. Unfortunately, it is not a distinguished one, there being—in the Broadway sense—only a few numbers of engaging quality. One is "When You Live on an Island," another "Fisherman's Wharf." Mr. Dietz, who also provided the lyrics, has not used his sharpest pencil in that department. The musical play also has three dance numbers, arranged by Edward Caton—a jungle dance, a ballet telling Sadie's story from Kansas to Pago Pago and a dance illustrating "Rain's" most famous phrase, "The Mountains of Nebraska." Milada Mladova, Chris Volkoff and Beatrice Kraft are the chief dancers.

Mr. Mamoulian has directed the production, there being no question that visually it is an excellent one. Boris Aronson's two settings are colorful, and the Motley costumes brilliant and sparkling. Mr. Mamoulian keeps his stage in action at all times, but not even he can bridge the gap which develops when a serious play is stopped dead for a light song—and immediately thereafter returns to seriousness. The best parts of "Sadie Thompson" are near the end, when "Rain" has ceased to fall on the stage and Sadie can get on with the song and dance and choral singing of a regular musical show. Sadie was wonderful in her first form, but it is hard to change her profession.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 17, 1944

Singing in the Rain

By HOWARD BARNES

A DISTINGUISHED and exciting music drama has come to the Alvin. "Sadie Thompson," which oldtimers will recognize immediately as a re-doing of "Rain," is a crafty blend of song, dance and theater. It is eminently theatrical. Even though the subject matter stems from the Ordovician, or H. L. Mencken, era of serious thinking about repentant tramps and hypocritical missionaries, it makes for a gala entertainment. The Vernon Duke score is full of melody without being pretentious. The Howard Dietz book and lyrics are dandy and the Rouben Mamoulian staging makes the most of a lively old play in a new guise.

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That the present production has taken liberties with the John Colton-Clemence Randolph dramatization of W. Somerset Maugham's short story that stood the town on its ear some twenty-two years ago is all to the good. The central drama, as played by June Havoc and Lansing Hatfield, is still solid. It is merely a core, though, of an infinitely varied stage exhibit. The dancing of Beatrice Kraft, Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff has a lot to do with this latter-day contemplation of South Sea derelicts on Pago-Pago. The music rings true throughout. And there is a wonderful montage section, mostly in pantomime, which makes Sadie quite as interesting a character as she was when she was being portrayed by Jeanne Eagels or Tallulah Bankhead.

• • •

Miss Havoc, to be sure, does a better job of acting than singing. Her voice is not exactly strong, and several more microphones would help the Alvin offering no end. But she sings on key and with simple authority, building the role of a bum into rather triumphant dimensions with her incidental performing. There are gradations in her portrayal which have taken a lot of doing. It is she who is principally responsible for holding the delicate balance between melodrama and musical embellishments which you will find in the piece.

• • •

Hatfield is better at singing than acting as the Reverend Davidson, who wishes to punish a scarlet woman, but finds himself dreaming about the mountains of Nebraska. His rendition of "Born All Over Again" is something to remember. Meanwhile, Ralph Dumke is a tower of strength as old Joe Horn, the Pago Pago inn-keeper, who was glad that he forgot about hellfire and perdition, and James Newill is excellent as the tough O'Hara who wants to marry Sadie, past or no past. Zolya Talma has a touching bit as Mrs. Davidson and Doris Patston adds immensely to the choral numbers. It might be noted that "Poor as a Church Mouse" and "Life's a Funny Present" are songs you are going to be hearing. "Sadie Thompson" is a happy musical resurrection of a somewhat archaic play.

THE NEW YORK SUN
November 17, 1944

'Sadie Thompson,' Done at Alvin, Colorful Show—and It's a Very Dull One

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE harsh and poignant play that was "Rain" came back to the New York theater last night as a song and dance show, bearing the title of "Sadie Thompson" and with June Havoc in the role that brought acclaim to Jeanne Eagels twenty-two years ago. As revealed in its first performance at the Alvin, this new production is costly, colorful—and very dull. I'll still take Pago Pago in its origina form.

Now the conflict between San Francisco Sadie and that fierce zealot, the Rev. Davidson, is done to the accompaniment of lyrics by Howard Dietz and music by Vernon Duke. Mr. Dietz has written better lyrics. Mr. Duke's score is undistinguished. The ballet numbers are certainly not inspired. And there's not a fragment of comedy in the show. But knowing "Rain," you wouldn't expect there would be.

The form of the original play is retained. Again Sadie and the Rev. Davidson and others of a strange lot are penned together in Joe Horn's dreary hotel-store in a stop-over port in the South Seas. Again there is the ceaseless downpour of rain and the chant of the natives. Sadie delivers her tirades, accepts conversion and her tormentor again turns to self-destruction. And with such a story the Messrs. Dietz, Mamoulian and Duke have attempted to blend ballads and jungle dances. They took on a difficult job, and I don't feel that they get away with it.

As one who has had respect and affection for the play, "Rain," for all these years, I found last night's proceedings of greatest interest when the story was being permitted to go its way, when there was no infusion and intrusion of song and dance. It is not a little startling to have the Rev. Davidson, the eternal persecutor, suddenly go into a number. And generally the numbers that have been supplied by Mr. Duke are decidedly on the routine side.

To June Havoc, an exciting personality of the musical comedy stage, falls the role created by the late Miss Eagels. It is not Miss Havoc's best part, but she does well with it. She suggests Sadie's frailty but never her hardness and harshness. There are moments when she bears an amazing resemblance to the magnificent Eagels. Miss Havoc, not strong vocally, has several songs, the best being "The Love I Long For" and "Life's a Funny Present."

Lansing Hatfield, in the role of the missionary, has a good voice but in the straight scenes he is merely a stock actor going through the motions. James Newill is really fine as Sergt. O'Hara, the simple-hearted Marine who promises Sadie a new life in Sydney. Zolya Talma is the forlorn Mrs. Davidson, Doris Patston plays a new character written into the play. The character of Dr. MacPhail has been omitted by the book writers. Ralph Dumke's Joe Horn, the South Seas philosopher, is all right for those who never saw Rapley Holmes as the trader of Pago Pago.

Excellent atmospheric settings have been designed by Boris Aronson and A. P. Waxman's presentation of Rouben Mamoulian's production is indeed elaborate.

But to me, "Sadie Thompson," for all its fine basic play structure and for all its jungle dances, is definitely tedious, a musical play of many shortcomings. It is a mixture that doesn't come off. A better score would have been greatly to its advantage.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 17, 1944

Musical 'Rain' Opens At the Alvin Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

WHEN the one true history of the American theatre comes finally to be written—I am not the man who's going to write it—last evening's entrant into the Alvin is apt to be known as the production in which June Havoc, actress, singer, dancer, came theatrically into her own. Truly hers is a notable performance, vivid, vital and amazingly well sustained. Even without her high white shoes, she is the Sadie Thompson her creator had originally in mind.

Just as I've always thought, the Somerset Maugham - John Colton - Clemence Randolph "Rain" is not the kind of theatre-piece of which plays-with-music are made. An opera in the grand manner, maybe! But not an evening of on-stage make-believe in which the ballets interfere with the story, the story interferes with the ballets, and the musical-comedy songs—"Poor as a Church Mouse" and "Life's a Funny Present," for example—just don't belong. It's all wrong!

Up in W. 52nd st., all the show-shop's best horses and most of the show-shop's best men have worked valiantly to prove otherwise. But, despite their talented trying, "Sadie Thompson" emerges as neither tragedy, comedy, operetta nor good lusty play-with-music. This shouldn't be. It is.

Salvation Sadie

Now that "Rain" has reverted to something like its initial title—it was known as "Miss Thompson" when first it saw the light of print — the story remains pretty much the same. Fleeing the police out of San Francisco, in California, on to Pago Pago, in the South Seas, our poor dear Sadie runs into Sergeant Tim O'Hara, who craves her for himself and the Reverend Alfred Davidson, who craves her for his God. In the end, they amount to the same thing. The sergeant wins.

But not until Sadie, the sinner, is converted by the man of God, then reconverted by that man of God right back again. It's a familiar enough narrative after all these readings and performances. And not as shocking as it used to be. Maybe we understand these shortcoming better nowadays; maybe we're merely more hardboiled. Whatever the reason, "Rain," with songs and dances added, is almost entirely without the drive it used to have. Now, it's kind of cumbersome.

And, as I can't repeat too often, the songs and dances that have been inserted help not at all. To the contrary! Frankly, I can't for the life of me imagine who it was in the first place that fancied "Rain" as a potential play-with-music. Even as a play with helpful and meritorious music, which the music of Vernon Duke is not.

Havoc's Helpers

Looking back at all the Sadie Thompsons I have seen, and I've seen Jeanne Eagels', Gloria Swanson's, Joan Crawford's, Norma Terris', Ann Corio's, Tallulah Bankhead's and that of a fearless female impersonator the name of which I have happily forgotten, the Sadie Thompson of June Havoc stands up bravely with the best of them. And this is not forgetting that Miss Havoc, unlike her predecessors, is called upon not only to act, but also to dance and sing.

The more helpful members of a huge, uneven cast are Ralph Dumke as Joe Horn, the Pago Pago storekeeper; Grazia Narciso as the storekeeper's worshipful wife; James Newill as Sergeant Tim O'Hara, the Marine who lands and has the Sadie situation well in hand; and Doris Patston as the Cicely who knows a solid South Sea Islander when she sees him. Lansing Hatfield as the Reverend Alfred Davidson forgets he isn't on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House . . .

Even with Rouben Mamoulian's artful direction, Edward Caton's orgiastic dances and Boris Aronson's effective settings to bolster up the foregoing, "Sadie Thompson" remains a muddled and none too mettlesome what-have-you. Like Stephen Leacock's eminent equestrian, it leaps on its horse and rides off in all directions.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 17, 1944

June Havoc a Grand Sadie, But 'Sadie Thompson' Has No Music

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"SADIE THOMPSON" has all of the elements of a superb musical show except one. It has a Class A book—the Somerset Maugham - John Colton - Clemence Randolph "Rain." I can't imagine anybody being better than June Havoc in the title role, or Lansing Hatfield as the Reverend Davidson. The supporting company is excellent, the setting is exotic and Rouben Mamoulian's direction and lighting are imaginative. But "Sadie Thompson" doesn't have any music.

When Ethel Merman bowed out of the cast and Miss Havoc took over it was reported that Miss Merman left because she wasn't satisfied with Howard Dietz's lyrics. It this is true Miss Merman made a mistake, for the lyrics are all right—particularly a number called "Poor as a Church Mouse." But Vernon Duke's score is heavy and dull and of scant variety.

What George Gershwin could have done with the "Sadie Thompson" setup! Or Vincent Youmans! The earthiness which could have been put into Sadie's songs, and the revivalist lift which would have been put into the Reverend Davidson's "Garden in the Sky" and "Born All Over Again"! But what one heard last night was just music by the yard.

June Is An Actress

Miss Havoc, who has been known as a sexy minx and a clown, is also an actress, and her Sadie is a trollop whose plight is truly touching. It would be easy for a musical comedy Sadie to overplay, but this Miss Havoc never does. She scores her points quietly but firmly, and builds a character which is far above the average for a tune show. Similarly, the Metropolitan Opera's Mr. Hatfield is convincingly hateful, twisted, and intense as the psalm-singing soandso.

Almost all of the action takes place in Trader Joe Horn's hotel and store in Pago Pago, and Boris Aronson's set isvery skillful and is, of course, equipped for rain of a nicely realistic sort. For a pagan dance number almost the whole thing "flies" and is replaced by a jungle without interrupting the action.

Ralph Dumke, drinking beer and looking like an amblable Nero Wolfe, makes an engaging Joe Horn. James Newill is pretty good as Sadie's marine sergeant friend, and there are some interesting dances by Beatrice Kraft, Milada Mladova, Chris Volkoff and others. Mamoulian, who has been specializing in group effects ever since he staged the play version of "Porgy and Bess," handles his chorus well.

It's unfortunate that so ambitious, expensive, intelligently planned and accurately cast a show should lack the score to make it come alive.

NEW YORK POST
November 17, 1944

"Rain" Becomes a Musical and June Havoc an Actress

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE idea of making a musical show out of "Rain" never appealed to this department, partly because the play has always seemed too good a show on its own to require any fancy trimmings, partly because we have never been quite able to accept anybody in the role of Sadie Thompson but the late Jeanne Eagels.

Let us hasten to report, therefore, that "Sadie Thompson," a musical version of "Rain," opened at the Alvin Theatre last night and proved uncommonly enjoyable. The success of the evening—for it was distinctly a success as far as this reporter is concerned—was due in part to the beautiful production accorded the work under Rouben Mamoulian's astute direction.

But more than anything else it was due to the surprisingly effective performance of June Havoc as Sadie. We say surprisingly, because Miss Havoc's talents have hitherto escaped us. In "Mexican Hayride," for instance, she struck us as a mere fanny waggler. Yet last night she came out on the Alvin stage and acted Sadie well enough to become a worthy successor to Jeanne Eagels. This is the highest compliment anybody could ever possibly pay Miss Havoc, and we shall leave it at that.

Back to Pago-Pago

In making "Rain" into what they call in the program a musical play, Howard Dietz and Mr. Mamoulian, with the collaboration of Composer Vernon Duke, have turned out a hybrid entertainment that is sometimes just regulation musical comedy, sometimes almost opera, sometimes interpretive ballet and sometimes just good old "Rain."

The different elements aren't always fused as well as they might be, and Mr. Duke's songs are probably never going to cause a major riot in Tin Pan Alley. His choral and ballet music generally has more distinction than his solos and duets for the principals. Especially trying are the thundering numbers Lansing Hatfield is required to deliver as the Rev. Davidson.

Considering how well "Rain" in general comes through the ordeal of being turned into a musical spectacle, it is our impression that Mr. Mamoulian might better have cast a dramatic actor as the Rev. Davidson and either pitched his solos into the orchestra pit or let the chorus handle the music. Mr. Hatfield tries hard but the Rev. Davidson, somehow, just isn't the type to burst into song like an opera singer on cue.

Otherwise the gist of the play is put over in good style by Ralph Dumke, James Newill, Zolya Talma, Doris Patston, Walter Burke, Grazia Narciso and a flock of South Seas natives somewhat prettied up for the occasion. And always Miss Havoc herself is in the picture, dramatically and musically. Her thin, husky little voice fits the role very well and she looks the part to perfection.

Edward Caton's dances range from the expected South Seas jungle numbers to some rather interesting effects in, of all things, what the program refers to as "Montage: Sadie's Conversion." Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff are the excellent principal dancers and there is good work by a talented young woman named Beatrice Kraft who plays a half-caste known as Honeypie.

But don't let that throw you off. "Sadie Thompson" is a good show. It always was and it still is, music, ballet, clever Boris Aronson scenery and all. Over it hovers the spirit of Mr. Mamoulian a director who knows how to create striking stage effects and at the same time make actors out of, well out of Miss Havoc, for instance.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 17, 1944

'Sadie Thompson' Goes Over with a Bang

By BURTON RASCOE

BELIEVE it or not, it has happened! A musical in a class with "Oklahoma!" has come to town! In fact, this new operetta is one of the most beautifully integrated shows of its kind I have ever seen and heard; and I don't like to make statements like that without carefully thinking back over "Show Boat," "Rose Marie," "The Vagabond King" and a dozen or so of the classics done by the Met and the Shuberts.

The show is "Sadie Thompson," a Rouben Mamoulian production, presented last night

at the Alvin by A. P. Waxman. It is based upon the short story, "Miss Thompson" by Somerset Maugham and upon the play called "Rain," which was made from it by John Colton and Clemence Randolph, which ran for 648 performances on Broadway and gave enduring fame to Jeanne Eagels, who starred in it.

I am still all atremor over the sheer, exciting beauty of this thing. But I must confess I was never more surprised in my life.

Music Is Tops

Why was I surprised? Because Vernon Duke, who has written the music for "Sadie Thompson," had never before given me any indication that he could write a melodious tune, and although I have carefully listened to and studied his more serious compositions (played by the highbrow orchestras and signed Vladimir Dukelsky, which is his real name) I have never before been convinced that he wasn't addicted to writing notes down on a sheet of musical composition paper without any reference to what the notes would sound like. Yet, in "Sadie Thompson," Mr. Duke has written a musical score that is not only full of heavenly sounds, pulse-quickening and ear-caressing but, in every instance, designed to interpret the text, elucidate character, further the action and contribute to the harmonic unity of the production.

There are songs in "Sadie Thompson" which have a syncopation that is original but lovely. There are rhythm-breaks that surprise you but are, as you realize when you hear them, perfect in the development of the melodic line. "Poor as a Church Mouse," thrice encored last night; "Life's a Funny Present," also encored; "Born All Over Again," "Fisherman's Wharf," and "When You Live on an Island" are all enchanting, but the effect of the whole score is what counts; for there is incidental music, even when there are no singing voices to be heard on the stage, and this incidental music is marvelous. With the possible exception of "The Song of Norway" there is no musical in town, or has been in many years, with a chorus of such fine male and female voices.

June Havoc Splendid

And, of course, the darling of the show is the lovely June Havoc. She made me cry half a dozen times, not by the pathetic scenes especially but by the consummate skill of her artistry. I also salute the magnificent drumming of Steve Rogers. . . . And the beauty of the ballet, "Sadie's Conversion," a choreographic number by Edward Caton which sets a standard even for Agnes de Mille, Catherine Littlefield and the ballet experimentors at the Met to shoot at. This is a ballet number that is truly interpretaive like a poem; it is a phantasmagoria of the subconscious and one of the most thrilling things I ever saw in my life.

Space halts me, so I can only pay tribute to: Beatrice Kraft (the famous Kraft sisters, known to nightclub patrons) for the delicacy and comedic grace in her dance numbers; to James Newill as Sadie's Marine sergeant sweetheart; to Lansing Hatfield, as the Rev. Davidson; to Ralph Dumke, as the islander gone native; to that superb team of ballet dancers, Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff, and to Gracia Narcisco as Mr. Dumke's native wife.

The settings by Boris Aronson are out of this world; the costumes by Motley are colorful and right, and a special bow must go to Millard Gibson for his work in handling the choral ensemble. And, lest they seem slighted, I think Mr. Dietz and Mr. Mamoulian are bright and skillful in their book and lyrics. For me "Sadie Thompson" is top in musical entertainments.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
November 17, 1944

Less 'Rain' and More Dampness

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SADIE THOMPSON, which came to the Alvin Thursday night, is a very elaborate musical version of *Rain*, and a very ineffective one. In any artistic sense it was on the cards for *Sadie Thompson* to fail, for it has been tortured into a form that simply does not fit it. But the things that might have redeemed it as entertainment, the music and dancing that might have given it their own kind of lift and drama, are not there either; so that, despite some scattered virtues, *Sadie Thompson* really fails twice.

The fundamental trouble, of course, is that you can't take a dramatic story, whose power lies in its tensions and constantly interrupt its action with here a song and there a dance and somewhere else a stage procession. Dramatically the thing becomes all starts and stops, and hence a mess. Moreover, *Rain* was among other things a play of mood, in which the steady downpour performed a dramatic function. In *Sadie Thompson*, it rains real water every so often, but in an absent-minded sort of way, just so you won't forget it is supposed to be raining continuously; and the play is no more atmospheric than it is tense.

And yet, at the same time, *Sadie Thompson* is a musical that you have to sit through in something like a serious frame of mind, for from beginning to end it is absolutely lacking in comedy. You could, I think, make a successful opera of *Rain*, by really translating its drama and its mood into completely musical terms; but you can't make a musical play.

• • •

But what really gets *Sadie Thompson* down is that the music itself is commonplace, the choreography quite uneven, and the general movement lacking in verve. Mr. Duke has turned out a score in which one song leaves no more impression than another; perhaps *The Love I Long For* and *Life's a Funny Present* are as agreeable as any. The dancing has its moments, but Milada Mladova and Chris Volkoff, who danced together with great effect in *The Merry Widow*, have this time nothing like the same opportunities; the chorus and specialty numbers are never outstanding; and the second-act ballet is downright bad.

For me the most enjoyable thing in the show is June Havoc, despite the fact that her voice isn't big enough, despite the fact, too, that she really isn't Sadie Thompson. But she looks the part, and gives it a certain poignancy; and she has, simply as June Havoc, an engaging quality that is the more welcome for being so sorely needed. As the Reverend Davidson, Lansing Hatfield has a very good voice, much the best in the show; and such other people as James Newill, Doris Patston and Ralph Dumke add something in the way of personality. Boris Aronson's jungle set is considerable stage color. But *Sadie Thompson*, having killed off its own innate drama, can find nothing much to substitute but a kind of lavish dullness.

"In Bed We Cry"

Play by Ilka Chase, dramatized from her novel of the same title; staging by John C. Wilson; settings by Joseph Platt; presented by Mr. Wilson at the Belasco Theater, November 14, 1944.

NEW YORK SUN
November 15, 1944

Comedy Very Flat in Miss Chase's Exhausting Play, 'In Bed We Cry,' at Belasco

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE talented and versatile Ilka Chase came forth at the Belasco last night under the auspices of John C. Wilson in her own dramatization of her popular novel and a rather distinguished audience assembled at the Belasco with high expectations, but I must report that "In Bed We Cry" provides an exhausting evening in the theater. It is, indeed, an inexpert play.

The production is glossy and dressed to the limit. Miss Chase wears a series of wonderful gowns. There is glib talk in the play, flip and quick, out of the book and out of her mind. But most of it falls flat as delivered by Mr. Wilson's cast. Material that was undoubtedly amusing in pages of the novel doesn't come off as dialogue delivered from the Belasco stage. And wouldn't from any stage.

THE CAST

Jasper Doolittle	Paul McGrath
Bruce Morely	John Kane
Devon Elliott Wainwright	Ilka Chase
Suzanne	Virginia Kaye
Tim Wainwright	Francis DeSales
Hilda	Gynia Gray
Miriam Doyle	Claudia Walden
Barbara Horlick	Helen Marcy
Nick Van Alston	Maury Tuckerman
Dick Hadley	Douglas Gregory
Jennie Moore	Ruth Matteson
Claire Dangerfield	Eleanor Audley
Fairweather	Harold Crane
Kurt Fabri	Frederic Tozere
Delivery Boy	Milton Spelvin
Maria Selmer	Elena Karam

As an actress, Miss Chase plays the central role, that of a career woman. Miss Chase is excellent in sharp and biting comedy, as in "The Women," and in "In Bed We Cry" she plays with vitality and frequently with telling effect, but it's a performance that tends toward monotony and her method of steadily delivering binding. There is an artificial quality about the acting, as with the play.

Frederic Tozere, generally a very smooth performer, is the predatory Fabri, so casual with his loves. I found him quite fascinating in his early moments, but the part finally got the better of him, particularly in the torrid love scenes. Paul McGrath gives likeability to the old-stand-by role of Jasper Doolittle. Ruth Matteson is pleasantly around and Elena Karam brings sharpness to the part of Maria, who was the Red Bank, N. J., branch of the Fabri conquests.

"In Bed We Cry" is all glitter and very little substance. Perhaps it might have something of a feminine appeal, but I found it quite unsatisfactory as a play, and also as an entertainment.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
November 15, 1944

Weep for Ilka's 'In Bed We Cry'

By BURTON RASCOE

"IN Bed We Cry," the play Ilka Chase made out of her little celluloid valentine of a novel, is one of those things. I suppose, which seems pretty good in manuscript but can become almost lethal when actors try to bring it to life on the stage.

Anyhow its presentation at the Belasco last night was more like an internment than an entertainment. The audience, expecting a comedy, filed out, finally, like honorary pallbearers at a funeral—and, of the play, I suspect it was.

It is the talkiest drama of the season and one in which the conversation is the dreariest. It is especially dreary because Miss Chase has tried so very, very hard to make her dialogue seem "smart" and "sophisticated." She fears a cliche as she must fear a mouse, and since her whole mental process seems too involved in the corniest sort of cliches, she apparently thinks that the way to avoid them is to utter them as jokes and then top them with a remark calling especial attention to them.

Moreover, something has happened to Miss Chase in acting in a play of her own composition. In plays by others she has been a brittle but delightful comedienne. In this one she acts throughout as though at any moment she may break out into a recital of "Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight." She constantly turns away from the person she is supposed to be talking to, faces the audience, lifts her head and elocutes to the spotlights in the gallery.

There is one quite effective scene in the last act, but it is made so by an especially fine bit of acting on the part of Elena Karam, vis-a-vis Miss Chase, in an emotional characterization in which Miss Karam portrays a trapped woman trying to alibi herself out of a situation in a story filled with fear, hate, and utter duplicity. An excellent job . . . Frederic Tozere, as always, was good, when not defeated by the unrealities of the part. Among the men, Paul McGrath and Francis DeSales, however, showed to the best advantage precisely because, although one is Miss Chase's husband and the other an old beau, neither is called upon to say or do much. Miss Chase has the floor most of the time.

The play tells of the curious and unhappy abridgments in the love life of a cosmetician who has grown immensely wealthy in the manufacture and sale of beautifiers for woman; of her chemist husband's abrupt giving her the gate for reasons which sound very phony as he states them and are quite unfathomable throughout, and of her taking unto herself a lover who is patently a gigolo.

The situation has possibilities for light, smart, comical treatment — or for tragedy. Miss Chase has written it neither way but as a sort of finishing school girl's make-believe of high life, sophistication, romance and heartbreak; a mixture of "L'Après Midi d'un Faun" and "Hearts and Flowers," on a squeaky gramophone, so to speak. She calls in the marines to close her show and even then doesn't know what her curtain line should be—"I'm free, at last, of Kurt"—but keeps on talking at great length to no purpose.

The cast is attractive; Miss Chase's dressmaker has done well by her, outfitting her in a dozen or so very spiffy numbers, and the sets by Joseph B. Platt have a satiric note and credibility the play entirely lacks.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
November 15, 1944

'In Bed We Cry' a Smarty-Pants Hunk of Claptrap for Ilka Chase

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"IN Bed We Cry," dramatized by a playwright named Ilka Chase from the book of a novelist named Ilka Chase for an actress named Ilka Chase, is more than a little bit as though one or more of these Chases had tried to combine Nelly the Cloak Model, Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl, Elizabeth Arden, Valentina, Mrs. Harrison Williams and Sheridan Whiteside.

In more direct words, the comedy which was offered at the Belasco last night by John C. Wilson is teddibly, teddibly smart but dramatically as corny as a Nebraska silo. It gives Miss Chase many opportunities to deliver cracks, some of which aren't bad; and every time she comes to a crack she heaves it over the footlights like Dancewicz of Notre Dame trying to score against Army with a forward pass.

In the play—and, I suppose, in the novel, too—Miss Chase is a wealthy cosmetician who is wonderful at creating perfumes but whose sex life is muddled. She has a butler named Fairweather. She has a husband who leaves her because he loves her. She has a lover — a slick refugee with old-world morals. She has a male business partner who should have been the guy all the time and finally becomes same, which is what he was once anyhow before Miss Chase's sex life got muddled.

Fairweather gets off lines like "Supper is served," and people have a couple more snorts of champagne and go offstage. Somebody says to Miss Chase—I think it was the refugee — "You are most feminine." Somebody else—I think it was her faithful business partner—kisses her smack dab on the wishbone.

I got very tired of the whole thing, but you must remember that Samson Raphaelson's "The Perfect Marriage" also gave me a pain in the neck, and they tell me this piece of hothouse hotcha is a hit.

Miss Chase's admirers in the play include Paul McGrath, Francis De Sales and Frederic Tozere. The very handsome Ruth Matteson is also present. There are some spiffy settings by Joseph B. Platt, and Miss Chase's draperies are by Adrian.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
November 15, 1944

—And So to Bed!

By HOWARD BARNES

ON the curious assumption that her so-called novel might be a gift to the theater, Ilka Chase has dramatized "In Bed We Cry." What is more, she has taken over the leading role in the new show at the Belasco. John C. Wilson has produced and staged the piece with infinite care, and a troupe of better than average players aids and abets Miss Chase in its projection. Whatever assets there may be in the production do not keep it from being a ponderous and pretentious bore. As that friend of mine said Tuesday night after the final curtain the author-actress "should have gone out and come in again."

* * *

For "In Bed We Cry," she has not even made a good try at conjuring up convincing or entertaining make-believe behind footlights. Long streamers of polite and supposedly witty drawing room and boudoir conversation are festooned around a maypole plot for five or six scenes. When the action finally touches on something of consequence in the final stanza, it is too late to save a very bad play from appearing exactly what it is. There was more than one dry eye in the house, I can assure you, when the heroine discovered that the husband she had deceived and divorced, had been killed in the wars.

* * *

At least, Miss Chase is better as an actress than as a playwright. Her brittle impersonation of a career woman, who falls for a gigolo as soon as her husband devotes himself to medical research for the Army, is definitely feline. She runs the old gamut of emotions with relish and even gets a bit mystical in the finale. That, of course, is the prerogative of an author who has designed a fat role for herself. What Miss Chase has failed to do was to give herself enough good lines to make "In Bed We Cry" palatable, acting or no acting.

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Her assistants struggle gallantly with the drawing room banter which makes up most of the proceedings. Paul McGrath is almost recognizable as the beauty expert's partner, who tries to keep her on center. Francis DeSales does what he can with a few brief interludes as the fellow who would rather fix up wounded soldiers than broken-down dowagers. And Frederic Tozere is as oily and unattractive an adventurer as any right-thinking woman would wish to flee. The trouble is that "In Bed We Cry" has neither comedy nor heart and the best of ministrations make it the more lamentable.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
November 15, 1944

"In Bed We Cry" Bows At Belasco Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

A SOMEWHAT distinguished initial congreation foregathered last night in the gloom of the Belasco Theatre to investigate the somewhat undistinguished dramatization Ilka Chase has made of her own "In Bed We Cry." Everybody knew everybody else, or pretended to. And, as goes without saying, there were no end of hoo-hooing, hand-waving and visiting up-and-down the aisles. Tickets sold for $3.40 per sitdown and the house was crowded from orchestra to ceiling.

John C. Wilson produced the play, Joseph B. Platt provided the backgrounds, Adrian ran up Miss Chase's gowns, enhanced by shoes by Henri Bendel and I. Miller, hats by Tatiana du Plessix, stockings by Jessie Zimmer and jewels by John Rubel. As you can see, everything was very, very smart. Or what passes for smart in these wartime nights and days. Everything but Miss Chase's comedy-melodrama-tragedy, in which she pretended to be one Devon Elliott Wainwright all evening.

As star, or leading-player, at any rate, of "In Bed We Cry," Miss Chase is considerably let down by Miss Chase, the dramatist, and Miss Chase, the novelist. I assure you that Miss Chase, the actress, is quite all right when the other two Miss Chases give her something worth while doing. This is infrequent.

Trying Triangle

A season or so ago, Doubleday-Doran, big-hearted publishers, were generous enough to send me a free advance copy of "In Bed We Cry." I was, I gathered, to read it, review it and recommend it, if recommending it were possible. Well, what with one book and another, I never managed to get around to what programs at the Belasco, when you can see to read them, refer to as Ilka Chase's "best-selling novel." It's as a play I'll have to consider it.

As a play, it's pretentious, long-drawn-out, not so very funny, telling with considerable detail and little believability how the aforesaid Devon Elliott Wainwright falls out of love with one man, falls into love with another man—oh, well, let it go—and then falls back into love with the first one. That the first one is her husband doesn't seem to matter, either to Tim, who is legal, or to Kurt, who isn't. Kurt is the season's blue ribbon heel.

Why Devon gives in for him, neither Miss Chase the novelist, Miss Chase the dramatist, nor Miss Chase the actress seems to know, or care! So this stale, preposterous and faultily-constructed triangle drags on throughout the evening, until Tim, the husband, is killed; Kurt the lover is discredited, and, I hope, Jasper, the business partner, takes over.

Acting Slick

The acting is slick, quite as worthy as the piece deserves. Ilka Chase knows her histrionic way around a drawing room, and, in the drawing supplied by Joseph B. Platt, she is perfectly at home. It's a cluttered-up drawing-room, suited to Miss Chase's cluttered-up play. But, by the time the final curtain has fallen, it's the drawing-room that wins. It, too, is smart, all right, but, as is a habit with drawing-rooms, it does keep its mouth shut.

Frederic Tozere plays Kurt, the heel, as if to the manner born. Francis DeSales is a likeable, but wavering Tim Wainwright,